



## MONTHLY HEALTH DATA FACT SHEET May 2003

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### **May is Skin Cancer Awareness Month and National Melanoma/Skin Cancer Detection and Prevention Month**

- Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the United States, affecting some 1 million Americans each year. Malignant melanoma is the rarest but deadliest form of skin cancer.
- Over 1,300 cases of melanoma were diagnosed in New Jersey in 2000.
- There were over 220 deaths due to melanoma among New Jersey residents in 2000.
- Melanoma is most common among those with lighter skin color. For example, whites are 20 times more likely than blacks to be diagnosed with melanoma.
- The melanoma incidence rate for males is nearly 60% higher than the rate for females while the mortality rate is about 2.5 times higher for males than for females.
- The melanoma incidence rate remained constant while the mortality rate decreased from 1996 to 2000.
- Risk factors for melanoma include excessive exposure to ultraviolet radiation (sunlight), fair skin, history of severe sunburns, personal or family history of melanoma, multiple moles or atypical moles (colored skin spots), giant congenital moles, xeroderma pigmentosum (a rare hereditary disease), and reduced immune function due to organ transplants or HIV infection.
- In 2002, about 33% of men and 28% of women in New Jersey report experiencing at least one sunburn during the past year. Nearly half of adults aged 18-24 report experiencing at least one sunburn during the previous year.
- Skin cancer can be prevented by limiting direct exposure to the sun especially during midday when the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays are strongest. If direct sun exposure cannot be avoided, sunscreen, umbrellas, broad-brimmed hats, and long-sleeved shirts and pants made of sun-resistant fabrics should be used.
- Early detection of skin cancer is possible by self-examination of moles and other unusual spots on the skin followed up by a doctor's exam of suspicious findings.
- The "ABCDs" of melanoma detection are:
  - A-asymmetrical spots
  - B-borders that are uneven or irregular

- C-color that is uneven and unusual
  - D-diameter larger than a quarter inch
- Treatment for skin cancer depends on many factors but usually includes surgery to remove the cancerous cells.

For more information about skin cancer from the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services:  
[www.state.nj.us/health/cancer](http://www.state.nj.us/health/cancer)

For more information about Skin Cancer Awareness Month: [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

For more information about National Melanoma/Skin Cancer Detection and Prevention Month:  
[www.aad.org](http://www.aad.org)

Sources:

New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, Office of Cancer Control and Prevention:  
[Melanoma Fact Sheet](#)

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[Cancer Risk Factors Fact Sheet](#)

New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, Center for Health Statistics:  
[New Jersey Health Statistics, 2000](#)  
New Jersey 1995-1999 Death Certificate Data Files, unpublished data  
[New Jersey Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, 2002](#)



James E. McGreevey  
Governor

Clifton R. Lacy, MD, Commissioner  
New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services  
PO Box 360, Trenton, NJ 08625-0360